no. 2

A

SERMON,

PREACHED

ON WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 1833,

BEING

THE DAY APPOINTED BY PROCLAMATION FOR A GENERAL THANKSGIVING TO ALMIGHTY GOD FOR HAVING REMOVED THE HEAVY JUDGMENT OF THE PESTILENCE.

BY THE REV. JOHN BETHUNE,

RECTOR OF CHRIST'S CHURCH, MONTREAL.

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1833.

TO

THE MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION

OF

CHRIST'S CHURCH, IN GENERAL,

AND TO

THOSE NUMEROUS FRIENDS AT WHOSE REQUEST IT IS PRINTED,

THIS SERMON IS INSCRIBED,

BY THEIR AFFECTIONATE FRIEND AND PASTOR,

THE AUTHOR.

MONTREAL, Feb. 17, 1833.

SERMON.

ST. LUKE, CHAP. XVII. V. 17.

"And Jesus answering said, were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?"

THESE words were pronounced by our Saviour on the occasion of his having healed ten persons of leprosy. Ten persons afflicted with a loathsome disease, against which severe laws were enacted, enforcing a separation from the rest of the people of the infected persons, had been cleansed by a word pronounced by the Saviour of the world, because they desired it. Cast off and excluded from the society of their fellow men, they cried out, in the anguish of their souls: "Jesus, master, have mercy upon us." Their prayer was no sooner uttered than answered: "Go shew yourselves unto the priests." This, according to the Levitical law, was the examination to which every person who had been afflicted with leprosy, must be subjected—he must be pronounced clean by the priest, before he could be restored to the intercourse and society of his friends. The ten persons in question, while labouring under their severe affliction, while their hearts were softened by their sorrow, had sufficient faith to induce them to pour out their grief before God, and to shew him all their trouble. Yet no sooner did nine of the ten find themselves released from the plague than all its horrors vanished from their thoughts as though they had never had existence—all their solemn

vows, and all recollection of the goodness and condescension and mercy of their deliverer, slipt from their memory like the passing cloud which leaves no trace behind. Only *one*—a tenth of the whole was "found that returned to give glory to God." Are you not ready to exclaim: what monstrous ingratitude? to give expression to the strongest feelings of indignation, amounting to abhorrence of those nine wretches who could so outrage the spontaneous feelings of the human heart, who could so debase human nature, who could be guilty of such a degradation of the dignity of man. These, or such as these, are, no doubt, the feelings excited in the minds of most persons who read the Evangelist's account of this transaction. But let us hold up this mirror—and let each individual look into it, and see whether he does not therein discover his own likeness. To do this effectually, let us compare the situation of these lepers with our own situation—*our* mercies with *their* mercies, and *our* conduct with *their* conduct.

They were indeed afflicted with a loathsome disease, and of a character so infectious that they were not permitted to mingle with others; insomuch that when they applied for relief, they "stood afar off"—apart from the throng. Yet their condition was by no means hopeless; since their disease was of a nature which might, in the space of a very few days, have yielded to the application of ordinary remedies. For it appears that after seven days separation, lepers might be so far recovered as to be admitted to the society of their brethren. But, what was our situation, during the prevalence of that visitation for the removal of which we are this day assembled to offer up our thanksgivings to Almighty God? It was not the unusual prevalence of some disease whose nature was well known to the physician, or whose violence we might reasonably hope

might yield to his skill. It was a pestilence whose nature was unknown to the physician, and setting all remedies at defiance. It was not by separating ourselves from the infected, that we could hope for exemption from its ravages. For the very air we breathed was filled with its poison; and its desolating hand found its way into the bedchambers of the rich, as well as into the hovels of the poor. No man could feel security in any precaution, nor could he flee from its presence; for where would it not have found him out? It was unlike any other pestilence; it was not confined to the noisome atmosphere of a few filthy streets, nor yet to the bounds of towns and cities; but spread abroad in the more healthy and less populous country. Neither the mountain with its pure air, nor the valley stored with nature's richest treasures, and watered by the refreshing stream, could claim any exemption from its ravages. The sun shone as brightly and as warmly as ever, but it conveyed not its usual cheerfulness to the heart—for each one looked upon it as the last sun which might shine upon his earthly pilgrimage. The blue vault of heaven displayed its shining and twinkling glories as resplendently as ever; but for us they possessed no charms, for all feared to purchase the delights of a summer's night walk at the dreaded expense of inhaling the breath of the pestilence. And then, how horrible was the disease itself! how loathsome, how frightful its appearance! how rapid its progress! how appalling its ravages! In one short hour the hapless victim was reduced from perfect health and strength to the helplessness of infancy, or of the most decrepid old age; and in a few, a very few hours more, was hurried into eternity. The sound of no business, was, for some time, heard in our streets, but that which was occasioned by the frequent visits of the physician and the minister of religious conso-

lation, by the removal of the sick to the hospitals, and of the dead to their graves; and the most busy scenes of man's labour were only to be witnessed in our cemeteries; where the most active exertions were often insufficient to prepare the last resting place for the mortal remains of those who were carried there in crowded and rapid succession.* The universal gloom was not even varied by the long and decent funeral train of sorrowing friends or of mourning relatives. The cart with its frequent load of mortality, exposed to the public gaze, and the oft repeated appearance of the unattended hearse, gave evidence of the dealings of the "King of Terrors" with the feelings of our affrighted citizens.† In ten days, more than three thousand had been smitten; and nearly one thousand had perished:‡ and in the space of three short moons, one-tenth of our population was swept away by the desolating scourge.§ Nor has this congregation been exempt from its full proportion of this

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* On the 19th of June, on entering the burial ground at Papineau Road, at six o'clock in the evening, the spectacle which met my view was truly appalling. The grass was strewed with coffins; about twenty men were employed in digging graves; and a few mourners stood in groups of three or four, apparently stupified with fear, or absorbed in mournful contemplation of the scene. They all gathered around me—some looked, and others said aloud, "what shall we do; where will all this end." After having consigned all the bodies that were there to the grave, I proceeded to the gate with the view of leaving this scene of death, supposing this part of my labours for the day to be ended; but the appearance of three or four carts in the road, each bearing its load of mortality, induced me to return. The same scene was repeated again and again, until the shades of evening began to close around us. With the gloom of this world's darkness comes frequently the gloom of the mind. The number of deaths had been daily and fearfully increasing, and both of my colleagues were suffering under the prevailing malady. It is not easy to describe the feelings produced by such a consciousness, in such a place, and at such an hour. I sat down, at length, on a newly covered grave, and gave vent to my overcharged feelings, in which I was joined, I believe by all present, not even excepting the grave digger, notwithstanding a fifteen years apprenticeship in his heart-hardening trade. I buried fifty-three on that dismal day.

† I one day met six carts with two bodies in each, between the Place d'Armes and the Court-house, a distance of about three hundred yards.

‡ The actual number of cases from the 13th June, the day on which the disease became alarming, to the 22d, both days inclusive, was 3209; and the number of deaths in the same period 862.

§ The whole number of burials recorded in the different rogisters of the city,

frightful mortality; the names of one thousand very nearly of its members have, within the year just ended, been registered in the book of mortality; amounting to about one-eighth of the whole resident and non-resident members; and of its resident members nearly six hundred have, in the same period, paid the debt of nature; amounting to one-tenth.* Such has been our situation; a situation surely far

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from the 11th June to the 11th September, is 2951. The whole number of burials, from the 1st January, 1832, to the 31st December, has been—

Roman Catholics	2732
Protestants...	1538
Total...	4270

amounting to a tenth of the population, allowing for emigration about ten thousand.

The whole number of burials in the year ending 31st December, 1831, was—

Roman Catholics	989
Protestants	475
Total	1464

amounting to one-thirtieth of the whole population, allowing for emigration as above.

From whence it will be apparent that the surplus mortality of the city, during the last, over the former year, has been 2806; and that three times as many deaths occurred in 1832 as in 1831.

* The actual number recorded in the register of the Protestant Episcopal Church, from the 1st of January, 1832, to 31st December, is 954, being an excess over the preceding year of 632; and over the average of the nine preceding years ending 31st December 1830, of 816. The burials recorded in the same register, for the year 1831, were very nearly treble the average of the nine preceding years, between each of which no very remarkable difference is found. Of the burials recorded in my register during the year 1832, it appears that 577 were residents; and the remaining 377 were emigrants. The Protestant Episcopal population of the Parish of Montreal, according to the census of 1831, was 5564, so that making a small allowance for the increase of one year, proportionate to the actual increase of the preceding five years, it will appear that in one year that population has been decimated. And if 3000 be allowed (a large allowance) of the passing emigrant population, for Protestant Episcopalians, then one-eighth of that number were buried here last year. It is remarkable that of the whole number of deaths in the Protestant Episcopal parish, during the year 1832, only 428 were by cholera—by other diseases 526; of these last 113 occurred from 1st January to the 11th June, and 413 after that period. After the disappearance of the cholera, the number of burials was 130; so that during the prevalence of cholera, the number of deaths by ordinary diseases was 283, much more than half the number of deaths by cholera. It is moreover to be remarked, that the number of deaths since the disappearance of cholera, say in three months and a half, has amounted to very nearly the average number of a whole year, for nine years ending 1830. In fact, all diseases, both during the prevalence of cholera, and since its disappearance, have proved much more fatal than at any former period. I could not help remarking this in the course of my professional visitations, before the results above stated could be known; and I have no doubt that medical men have remarked the same thing—all speculation on this subject must, of course, be left to them.

worse than that of the "Ten lepers" alluded to in our text. For had not the hand of the destroying Angel been stayed, the whole of our population must, ere this day, have been cut off. And as our affliction has been greater, in the same proportion have the mercies we have received been greater. All who are here assembled, and many more, have either been healed of the plague, or exempted from its ravages. It is to the mercy and forbearance and loving-kindness of the Lord that we are indebted for our exemption. What then has been our conduct? Has more than *one* in ten been *found to give glory to God*?—has even that small proportion been found to do so? Perhaps something more than this proportion are here assembled this day to offer up their public thanks for the public mercy. But how many have been found to *give glory to God* in their individual and daily conduct? What improvement has been made in the heart and life? Have the vows which you made during the prevalence of the pestilence, when the sword of the destroying Angel was gleaming before your eyes, and smiting down six of your fellow-citizens every hour*—when each of you was in momentary dread of being the next victim; have the vows which you then made been kept? or did they not slip from your memories with the disappearance of the danger, leaving no fruit behind. Did not each of you, in the midst of your alarm, when you were surrounded by *the terrors of the Lord*, when your hearts were sinking within you from very fear; did you not then stretch out your hands to God in prayer for his protection; were you not more desirous than ever of cultivating acquaintance with him, of being assured that *he careth*

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† On the 19th June, 149 died. This number divided by twenty-four gives something more than six.

for you; did you not then promise and vow in his presence that your exemption from the calamity would be followed by amendment of life—that you would henceforward "renounce the pomps and vanities of the world and all the sinful lusts of the flesh"—that you would continue to "lead a new life, walking in the commandments of God;" in one word, did you not resolve to *put off the old man which is corrupt after the flesh*, and to *put on the new man, which after Christ Jesus is created in righteousness and true holiness?* Did you not promise all this, and much more than this? So did the nine lepers; for they cried out, "Jesus, master, have mercy on us." And now the question is, whether you have kept these promises and resolutions, and whether you have diligently sought for the grace of God to keep you stedfast in them? This is a question which your own consciences must answer; and by which you will be *persuaded in your own minds* whether, as far as you are concerned, the visitation which it has pleased God to send among us, has answered the desired effect; whether, in one word, you have been found returning to "give glory to God?"

And now, my brethren, although I do not desire nor pretend to penetrate the recesses of the hearts of others, or to judge any one with a rash or capricious judgment, yet there are certain indications whereby the dearest wishes of the human heart are made manifest. If, "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," out of the same abundance do the actions and conduct of men speak. Judging then by this rule, it becomes my painful duty to remark that certain signs have manifested themselves among you, which point out too plainly that a proportion equal to the nine lepers, it is much to be feared, have not been found, in the sight of God, returning *to give glory to*

Him, for their deliverance. I feel myself imperatively called upon, by a sense of my sacred duty, affectionately, but decidedly to remonstrate with you, this day, on this truly lamentable subject. I shall make no apology; for God forbid that I should apologize to man for the faithful and fearless discharge of my duty to my Master who is in heaven.

I have said that certain signs have manifested themselves: need I point them out? I must do so, in order to remark upon them. The scenes of dissipation and gaiety which are peculiar to this season of the year, have, during this winter, suffered no abatement:—no abatement did I say? Alas! they have been extended, if not in frequency, at least in folly, beyond their usual limits. Perhaps some one will say that such amusements are in themselves innocent—that they do not pass the bounds of harmless gaiety, and cannot be stigmatized with the name of criminal dissipation—that they are not inconsistent with the Christian life—that the visitation of God could not, therefore, have been sent among us to punish us for our conduct in this respect—and that, consequently, to continue to pursue that conduct *now*, cannot be worse or more inconsistent than at any other time. To render this argument even plausible, it must first be proved that such public amusements are innocent, and not inconsistent with the Christian life. But assuming this proposition, for the present to be true, the corollary by no means necessarily follows. I will admit it follows, so far as the general principle goes, that it would be something amounting very nearly to hypocrisy to abstain *for a season* only, for a mere shew of thankfulness, from what we might think ourselves at liberty to pursue at a more distant period. But, my brethren, there are peculiar circumstances connected with our situation, which must

render the indulgence in your wonted gaieties, *for this winter*, improper; even on the supposition that they were in themselves innocent. There are many of these which the common *decencies of life* require us, under certain circumstances, to abstain from. The common decencies of life, for example, require that we should not carry about—

"The mockery of woe
"To midnight dances and the public show."

And let me ask which of us has not, within the last year, lost some relative or dear friend? If all who are so circumstanced abstained from public amusements, (and why should they not under the peculiar circumstances of the case?) few indeed could be found to mingle in them. Let me further ask, have not even these decencies been violated? Decencies, which, in ordinary times, have exerted their due influence, have, alas! now lost their efficacy: as if it were necessary to celebrate the joyful escape from the judgments of God which have been abroad among us, by bounding over the ordinary restraints of social intercourse. Has not *the snare of the fowler* been successfully *spread even in the sight of the bird*? Has not the mother who has seen the grave closed but a few months over her darling child—the sister who still wears the mourning emblems of sorrow for a brother—the son whose father was numbered among the victims of the late desolating scourge; have not these, and many like these, been found in the gayest ranks of the gayest scenes of dissipation? Would these things have happened had not the temptation been held out? Would they have occurred had there been among us that feeling which ought to have been? a feeling of thankfulness to God for his great mercies, which must have shrunk, with abhorrence, from even the appearance of for-

getfulness of those scenes of human misery, and suffering, and dreadful alarm, which so recently caused the stoutest heart to quail. My brethren, you may perhaps think I speak strongly; I trust and hope I do; it is my desire, and my intention to do so; for I feel strongly. I feel grief and shame for what has passed, and is still passing around us; and I pray God, the expression of it may touch the hearts of the guilty, with a feeling of repentance and abhorrence of their conduct.

Who then shall talk of the innocence of those amusements, or the harmlessness of that gaiety which lead to such unhappy results, which produce effects so unnatural and so grievous? I shall not enter into the abstract question of their innocence, or compatibility with the Christian life; for I have not space for such an enquiry, and I have, moreover, more than once spoken at large on the subject, in this place; but I will merely ask you to apply to this question the events which have recently passed, and are still passing around us; and I will, moreover, ask you to try the question by the test of your own conduct, while the pestilence was yet among you. Were not all the pomps and vanities of the world, the pursuits of pleasure, of pride and of this world's ambition, then given up? You will, perhaps, say they were inconsistent with a season of such unexampled calamity. But why inconsistent? If there was no wrong, no offence against the laws of God, in the things themselves, why should the immediate fear of death have had such a magic influence upon their indulgence? Shall it be urged that things, in themselves lawful, may not under certain circumstances be expedient? I admit the plea, but deny its application in this case; unless it can first be proved that it was not the fear of death which caused the change. But apply the same plea to the things

which have recently been passing around us. Supposing the eager and even unwonted pursuit of pleasure to be *lawful* to the Christian, under ordinary circumstances, are they *expedient*, under our circumstances at present? The conscience of every reflecting person must answer—No.

And now, my brethren, let me beseech you to examine yourselves, this day; when you are professing to return thanks to the Giver of all Good, for the removal of the pestilence; and to labour earnestly to discover what effect this visitation of God has produced upon your minds. Have you received it as His visitation; as the chastisement of His correcting hand? This is the first and all important question. If you can answer this in the affirmative; it then becomes necessary to enquire what particular parts of your own conduct have had their share in the provocation; and to set immediately, if you have not already done so, about their reformation. Many of you, I know, have made the vows and promises of which I have already spoken; some have, moreover, kneeled at the Lord's table, who seldom or never did so before; and some began, for the first time, the practice of offering to God the incense of the daily family prayer. But have these things been continued; or have they passed away with the immediate cause, like *the morning cloud or the early dew*? Others again have, with a laudable and praiseworthy activity, engaged themselves in works of extensive charity and brotherly love. But have these unwonted acts proceeded from love to God—from a grateful and abiding sense of your own deliverance—from the pure desire to administer consolation to those whom God has afflicted, while he has spared you? Beware, my brethren, that such offerings be not made in the spirit of compromise; lest you find yourselves seeking to atone, by acts of mercy to others, for your own want of

thankfulness to God. That thankfulness must be proved by *newness of life.* The mere expression of it, without a correspondent amendment, will be as unavailing as the tears of the sinner shed in mere sorrow for past offences, without any resolution to forsake sin in future. Consider this, I beseech you; and come before the *throne of Grace,* from which you have need of that which you cannot procure elsewhere; and without which, you cannot stand acquitted before Him who is *of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.* Seek then the pardon of your past errors, by earnest repentance; by a firm resolution to forsake your sins, and to lead a new life, "following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways;" and then, through the blood of our blessed Redeemer shed for this special purpose, and through the grace which will be imparted from the Mercy Seat of God, you will obtain pardon for past transgression, and strength to *go on your way rejoicing,* cheered by sure and certain hope here, of everlasting peace and glory hereafter.